

STATE ARCHIVES ANNUAL REPORT

2020



Digital Archivist, Kate Telford, assists Dwayne Keys, Chair of South Providence Neighborhood Association, with historical research in February 2020.



Nellie M. Gorbea
Secretary of State



ABOUT US



WHO WE ARE

The Rhode Island State Archives is operated by the Rhode Island Department of State under the leadership of Secretary of State Nellie M. Gorbea. The State Archives was first authorized by Rhode Island General Laws Chapter 42-8.1 in 1989, under the purview of the Secretary of State. It was established that, "the division shall be the official custodian and trustee for the state of all public records of permanent historical, legal or other value, regardless of physical form or characteristics, which are transferred to it from any public office of the state or any political subdivision thereof."

WHAT WE DO

As the repository for official permanent records of Rhode Island state government, the State Archives strives to protect, maintain, and preserve Rhode Island's powerful history.

The State Archives has three primary objectives:

1. To advance the Rhode Island Department of State's mission to engage and empower all Rhode Islanders by making government more accessible and transparent and encouraging civic pride;
2. To assist Rhode Island residents in learning about their history and increase awareness of Rhode Island's history; and
3. To ensure transparency and accessibility by conserving and preserving records and making them available to the public through exhibitions, public programs, and digital initiatives.

In addition to preserving permanent records of state government, the State Archives also works closely with cities and towns to manage the State Archives Local Government Records Program. This work ensures that records across Rhode Island are maintained and preserved according to the law.

The Local Government Records Program helps cities and towns through a variety of programs including:

- Workshops & Public Presentations: State Archives staff provide updated information on standards, best practices, and State Archives services for records management and preservation; and
- Clean-Up Days: State Archives staff provide full-day guidance and on-site approval for destruction of records which have met their legal retention requirement.

THE STATE ARCHIVES TEAM

Ashley Selima
State Archivist &
Public Records
Administrator

Tracey Croce
Local
Government
Records
Coordinator

Richard Hite
State Records
Coordinator

Ken Carlson
Reference Analyst

Kate Telford
Digital Archivist

Zachary Garceau
Administrative
Records &
Technical Services
Specialist

**Kaitlynne
Ward Morris**
Director of State
Archives, Library,
& Public
Information

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Island's History
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FROM SECRETARY GORBEA



Dear Rhode Islander:

The State Archives is home to an important collection of documents that chronicle Rhode Island's remarkable and diverse history. Our public records are rich with stories that show how ordinary Rhode Islanders lived, were civically engaged, and shaped the Ocean State.

In 2020, we saw an unprecedented year with unexpected challenges. The pandemic fundamentally altered our lives. Through the State Archives' collection, we can see how public health crises fundamentally altered the lives of past generations and how our state responded. Just as we rely on the State Archives to learn from the past, future generations will rely on the State Archives to tell the state's COVID-19 story.

Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the State Archives has been operating with modified in-person services since September 2020, but my staff has worked to improve access to the State Archives by digitizing scores of records that Rhode Islanders may now browse from the comfort of their homes. I am pleased to report that my staff has worked diligently to make over eighty-nine thousand records available to researchers, despite the limited on-site research services we are able to offer during the pandemic.

Despite the challenges we have faced due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020 was a great step forward in our efforts to secure a safer space for our historic treasures. I am pleased to report that in July the State Archives relocated to a new, upgraded space. This new space is a huge step forward in our ongoing preservation efforts as it features state-of-the-art climate controls, security, and fire suppression that ensure proper archival storage to preserve our history for generations to come.

As your Secretary of State, I will continue the important work of ensuring that the richness of our history is preserved and remains accessible to all Rhode Islanders for generations to come. I look forward to when we fully reopen the State Archives for research and exhibitions.

Sincerely,

Nellie M. Gorbea
Secretary of State

OUR COLLECTION



More than
10 MILLION
records



Accumulated over
380 YEARS



Over
100,000
digital objects



Over
619,000
digital downloads



LOOKING BACK: 2020 IN REVIEW

A YEAR IN PUBLIC PROGRAMS



92

TRAVELING
TREASURES
ATTENDEES



623

VIRTUAL
PROGRAMS
VIEWS



1,024

OUT-OF-STATE
RESEARCHERS



748

IN STATE
RESEARCHERS

A YEAR IN RECORDS



2,165

STATE AND LOCAL
AGENCIES RECORD
REQUESTS



5,355

HISTORICAL
RECORDS
REQUESTED



4,869

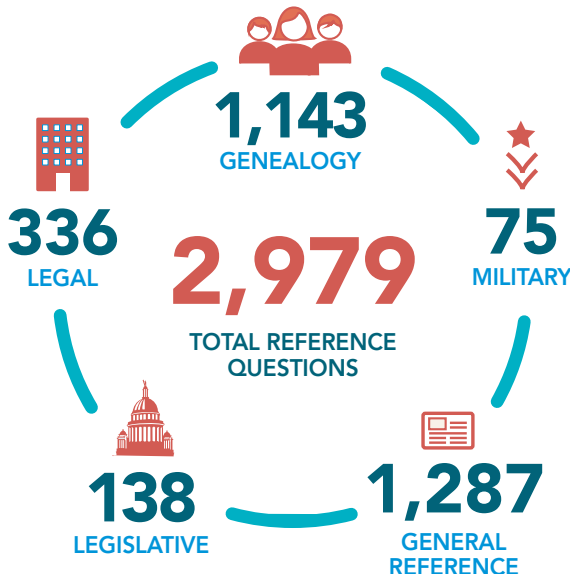
HISTORICAL
RECORDS
RETRIEVED



226

DUAL
CITIZENSHIP
ASSISTANCE

A YEAR IN REFERENCE



LIFE CYCLE OF A REFERENCE QUESTION

1

REFERENCE QUESTION

"I'm a children's author and I am working a story about George Washington's visit to Newport in 1790. I am trying to track down a short book that you have in your archives that has details about that visit. It is called *Washington's Visits to Rhode Island* by Howard Preston."

2

REVIEW REQUEST

We review our catalog, finding aids, and accession records then retrieve items and review them to ensure they answer the requester's question.

3

RECORD ASSESSMENT

If the records are in proper condition, we scan and digitize it.

4

DIGITIZE THAT RECORD

- › Scan record at high resolution;
- › Update record entry in the State Archives Catalog;
- › Upload scan to the Digital Archive; and
- › Link to the catalog for direct access.

5

PROVIDE ACCESS

We respond to the request with all the information found at the State Archives, and provide links to the requested record that can be downloaded.

To expand accessibility and to grow our online collection, items digitized for specific requests are also added to the Digital Archive.



LOOKING BACK: HIGHLIGHTS

OUR COLLECTIONS

PHYSICAL



+18.2 CUBIC FEET OF RECORDS TO
OUR EXPANDING HISTORICAL COLLECTION

We preserve more than **4,000** maps and plans of Rhode Island; more than **9,000** boxes of historic documents and photographs; over **11,000** reference volumes for daily research; and Rhode Island's founding documents dating from 1638.

ACCESS AND USAGE

In 2020, the State Archives adapted its programming in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Offering new, virtual programs to provide information about and access to our records in new ways. Many of these programs are now available on YouTube for on-demand viewing.

5,000
NEW ENTRIES



New entries added to the Archives Catalog.

105,486
LINKED RECORDS



Linked records from the Archives Catalog to the Digital Archive.

63,044
NEW DIGITAL FILES



Increased the Digital Archive to 89,323 searchable and downloadable files.

619,323
DOWNLOADS



Content downloaded from the Digital Archives.

623
TOTAL VIEWS



Total views from our four new workshops video tutorials.

DIGITAL



+1.2 TERABYTES
OF NEW ITEMS ADDED TO DIGITAL STORAGE

Our team worked to expand our Digital Archive for researchers at-home. Substantial new material was added, in total:

15,416 new records scanned for long-term preservation; and

40,364 new items uploaded to the Digital Archives.

New to the Digital Collections

COVID-19 response (2,057 records):

This collection targets the videos, guidance, regulations, and other material released by the Governor and other State Agencies, including the State Police, in response to the public health crisis. This collection continues to grow each week.

Women Suffrage RIESA Member cards (7 items)

Catholic Church Charters, 1869-1972 (142 scans)

WPA 1938 Hurricane photographs (38 images)

Congress at Philadelphia (52 scans)

Revolutionary War Privateers lists (1774-1783)

World War I Service Cards (25,035 images)

Report of the Governors Civil Rights Taskforce January 1964 (64 scans)

State House Marble restoration photographs (90 images)



PRESERVING RHODE ISLAND'S STORY

We moved!

As recommended by NEDCC in 2019, the State Archives took conservation action prior to the relocation to appropriately box our loose records and volumes into new, archival, and acid-free housings to better preserve them for the future. This conservation effort, as part of the move, guaranteed both safety for the records and best use of storage space in the new vault.



PREPARING TO MOVE

10 MILLION
RECORDS

More than nine months to barcode and create an accurate catalog of our records.

4,585 BARCODED
CONTAINERS



MOVING OUR HISTORY

380 YEARS OF
HISTORY

Records were stored following **strict archival guidelines** over the 21 relocation days.

+9,000 BOXES, MAPS
AND VOLUMES



NEW LOCATION

700 STAFF
HOURS

It took 12 weeks and two staff working full time to appropriately link barcodes and new vault locations in State Archives Catalog.





PRESERVING RHODE ISLAND'S STORY

Keeping Control of our Records

The vault location of our records is written on every box or container at the same time it is entered into our online catalog. Often, the same series of records can consist of 50 or more boxes, such as the RI Public Laws. Location information, both physical and online, assists the State Archives in ensuring we know the name, volume, and location of every government record entrusted to our care.

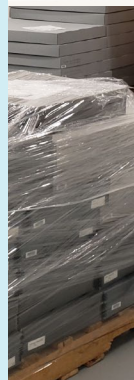
A GLIMPSE AT THE PROCESS

1. Verify the location of the box and move, as needed, to make the best use of space and keep record series together.
2. Erase old location and pencil in new location on box.
3. Create new location at 33 Broad Street in the catalog.
4. Edit the 337 Westminster location to be Temporary Reading Room.
5. Open the location and set the 337 location to previous noting end date.
6. Add the current 33 Broad Street location with start date.
7. Move current location up to appear first in the catalog.

MANY LOOSE RECORDS IDENTIFIED BY NEDCC IN 2019 WERE BOXED PRIOR TO THE MOVE, INCLUDING:

- Vital records of births, marriages, and deaths;
- Records of the State Auditor;
- Colony Records, 1641-1851;
- Petitions to the General Assembly;
- French and Indian War and Revolutionary War Military Volumes;
- Federal Census books;
- General Assembly Proceedings;
- Admiralty Records;
- Secretary of State Articles of Incorporations;
- Land Evidence; and
- Maritime papers.

Each of these new boxes was additionally barcoded and updated in the archives catalog to show the volume of each collection.





PUBLIC PROGRAMS

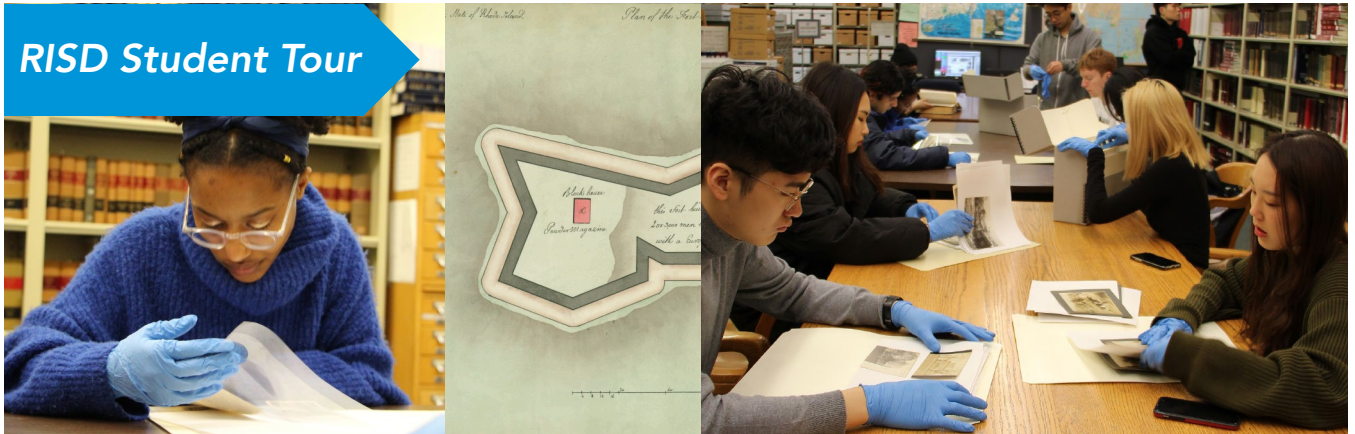
Finding Ways to Connect While Apart

Despite the many challenges we faced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the State Archives developed new and innovative ways to connect with Rhode Islanders in 2020.

Our year started with a plan for a robust slate of public programs before shifting online in response to the unprecedented public health crisis.

IN-PERSON EVENTS

RISD Student Tour



In January 2020, the State Archives welcomed a group of students from the Rhode Island School of Design for a tour and research session of our visual and photograph collections.

Genealogy Workshop



Richard Hite, State Records Coordinator, lead a workshop focusing on common pitfalls in genealogical research and shared the substantial amount of information researchers can access at the State Archives. This presentation also provided a step-by-step walkthrough of tracing a family back through State Archives records and was presented at the Cumberland Public Library on January 27, 2020.



We celebrated Black History Month with Secretary of State Nellie M. Gorbea at the Rhode Island State Archives on February 27, 2020. "Discover Our Story: The Black Community in Providence" was an event that included a panel of four (4) community leaders, including RI Health Director Dr. Nicole Alexander-Scott, talking about how historically black communities in Providence have changed over time through maps, census documents, and other vital records housed at the Rhode Island State Archives.



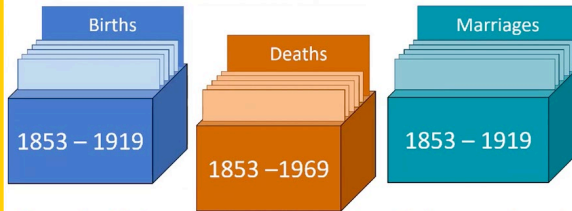
Left to right: Our panelists researching prior to the event. Len Cabral, Storyteller; Dwayne Keys, Chair of South Providence Neighborhood Association; and Rev. Justin R. Lester, Congdon Street Baptist Church.



PUBLIC PROGRAMS

VIRTUAL EVENTS

VITAL RECORDS AT THE STATE ARCHIVES

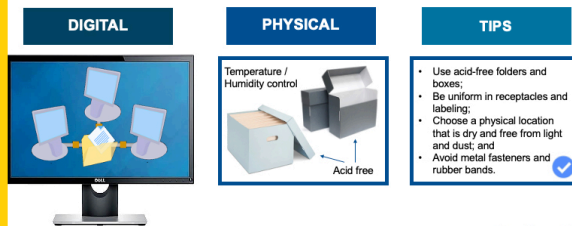


GENEALOGY WORKSHOP WITH THE RI STATE ARCHIVES

In celebration of National Archives Month, this presentation focused on conducting genealogy research at the Rhode Island State Archives and offered general research tips and commonly asked family history research questions!

[Link to video](#)

STORAGE: HOW DO WE KEEP RECORDS SAFE?



ARCHIVING 101 WORKSHOP

The State Archives partnered with the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities (RICH) for a workshop on the basics of archiving with a special focus on considerations when archiving digital projects in the age of a global pandemic. This was part of the Shall Not Be Denied year long initiative.

[Link to video](#)



RHODE ISLAND STATE ARCHIVES TOUR

Secretary of State Nellie Gorbea and Rhode Island State Archivist Ashley Selima provided a virtual tour of our exciting new State Archives facility located at 33 Broad Street in Providence.

[Link to video](#)

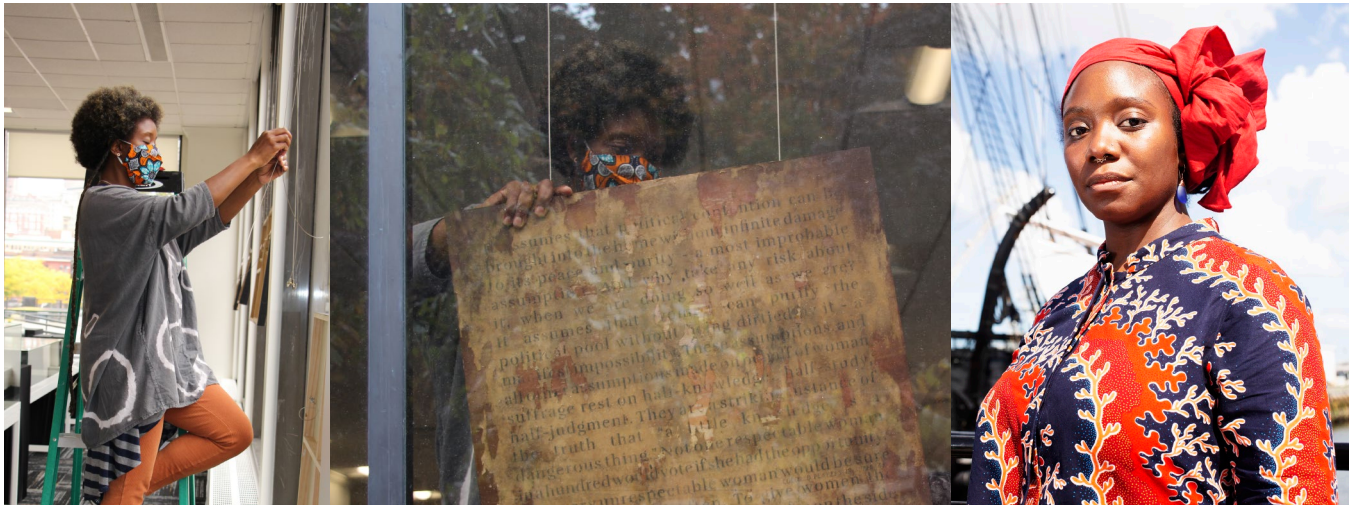


INTERVIEW WITH ARTIST BECCI DAVIS

100 Years of Delusions and Half Truths by artist Becci Davis uses records from the RI State Archives. In this interview, Becci Davis and State Archivist Ashley Selima discuss intersectional issues of place, empathy, and power in the history of how the 19th Amendment was ratified.

[Link to video](#)

SIDEWALK EXHIBIT



100 Years of "Delusions and Half Truths"

New Mixed Media Works by Becci Davis

Becci Davis is a Rhode Island-based interdisciplinary artist whose creative practice explores the politics of representation, commemoration and monuments, both structural and cultural. Her work questions how to engage with an archive whose source and steward has historically been the oppressive culture that ignored, suppressed, and erased the contributions of her forebears.

For more information visit beccidavis.com



Becci Davis' work was displayed in the windows of our 33 Broad Street location from October 15th - December 4th, as part of a new exhibit style that highlights work that shows historical records through an artistic lens.



OUR PARTNERSHIPS

Even though 2020 brought unprecedented challenges to archives, museums, and historical organizations throughout the country, the State Archives still maintained our spirit of collaboration and partnered with our community in several new ways.

URI GSLIS STUDENT

The Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Rhode Island sent a Graduate student to the State Archives for their professional field experience. The intern focused on modernizing the Records Retention Schedules that are posted to the Secretary of State's Records Management website page.

CENTENNIAL OF THE PASSAGE OF WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

In a new endeavor, the State Archives worked closely with two artists to exhibit work inspired by the Centennial of the passage of Women's Suffrage.

BECCI DAVIS

Becci Davis' work was displayed in the windows of our 33 Broad Street Location from October 15th - December 4th as part of a new exhibit style that engaged viewers from the sidewalk.

NAFIS WHITE

Nafis White's work will launch in 2021 – keep an eye out on the windows as we move into the new year.

PUBLIC LIBRARIES – TRAVELLING TREASURES

Thank you to the West Warwick Public Library and the Greenville Public Library for hosting the State Archives pop-up exhibit early in 2020 prior to the program reconfiguration due to COVID-19.

SHALL NOT BE DENIED

This partnership initiative of the Rhode Island Department of State and the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities aimed to amplify all the wonderful work being done to engage with the anniversary of a pivotal moment in our nation's history – the passage of the 19th Amendment.

PRESERVICA

The State Archives has used Preservica as its trusted digital repository since 2017, but in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, Preservica stepped forward with an additional partnership opportunity. Through the #OurCOVID19Story initiative the company provided 250GB of free, additional storage that will not expire to assist the State Archives in documenting the effects of the novel Coronavirus and how Rhode Island responded to the public health crisis. You can view the collection "COVID-19 Pandemic Response" by visiting the Digital Archives homepage.





Nellie M. Gorbea
Secretary of State

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